




The Art of American Furniture



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/artofamericanfur00bowd>

The Art of American Furniture

*A Portfolio of Furniture in the Collections of
The Bowdoin College Museum of Art*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM POOLEY

COVER BY JOHN McKEE

Exhibited April 7 to May 12, 1974

Copyright 1974 by the President and Trustees of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine

This project is supported by a grant from
the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D. C.,
a Federal agency.

Printed by the Anthoensen Press, Portland, Maine
Illustrations by the Meriden Gravure Co., Meriden, Connecticut

The Art of American Furniture

FURNITURE is new to the purview of Art History, but it should not be. The Renaissance made strong distinctions between artists and craftsmen. Before that era, the craftsman, painter, architect and sculptor stood side by side. In early fourteenth-century Siena, the man who built the frame for the Maesta, Duccio, who painted it, Giovanni Pisano, who designed the facade of the cathedral and Nicola Pisano, who carved the pulpit, were all considered equal participants in art. The main difference, as exemplified above, is that the names of the painters, architects and sculptors are known. Most craftsmen remain more anonymous. Few creators of the Decorative Arts have been the subject of monographic study.

For American furniture the problem is more complex. One must not only contend with a certain prejudice against furniture as works of art, but also deal with the notion that the American arts belong in a category even more removed from art than the European Decorative Arts. Nevertheless, furniture can be treated with the same art historical methods as painting, architecture and sculpture. It is, in fact, a partner with the other forms of art. In many cases Decorative Art is the leading avenue for stylistic development. New tendencies often appear

first in furniture. It could be argued that the origins of the Renaissance are found in the revival of classical decorative *cosmati* work in the thirteenth century. (Some believe Giotto himself began as a *cosmati* worker in Rome.) The paintings by Agostino, Annibale and Lodovico Carracci explore new ground, but their decorations in the Farnese Palace forecast the Baroque to an even greater degree. In our own times, Art Nouveau and Abstract Art appear first as styles in the Decorative Arts and furniture.

American furniture before 1840 is basically a reflection of prevailing European styles. Native propensities toward greater simplification of surfaces and contours appear in American furniture. Some entirely indigenous designs occur, but the art of American furniture is best studied in relation to European styles. To accomplish this, European furniture has been juxtaposed to the American pieces. Furthermore, European furniture designs revealing the origins of many ornamental details and overall forms which appear in American furniture between 1650 and 1850 have been included. Some of the designs by Thomas Chippendale, George Hepplewhite, Thomas Sheraton and George Smith were used very consciously in America. Chippendale's *Di-*

rector may have arrived soon after its first publication in 1754 (possibly in New York) but it is certain that it arrived by 1763 when the English cabinetmaker, Thomas Affleck, brought a copy of the 1762 edition to Philadelphia. The *Works in Architecture* by James and Robert Adam was ordered by Benjamin Franklin even before it was published. Thomas Seymour, the renowned cabinetmaker who lived in Portland, Maine, and Boston owned a copy of Sheraton's *Drawing Book* of 1791. Plates from Smith's 1826 edition of *The Cabinet-maker and Upholsters Guide* were used (or more exactly plagiarized) by the New York furniture firm of Thomas Meeks and Company in their broadside of 1833.

The present exhibition contains several works made by Thomas Dennis, perhaps the most famous seventeenth-century American cabinetmaker, as well as a Pennsylvania secretary from the Bachman school in Lancaster, a card table sometimes attributed to David Poignand, several pieces made in Maine, and works once owned by Eli Whitney and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Research on furniture is lengthy. Many experts must be consulted. For that reason the full catalogue of the Bowdoin Collection will be published after the exhibition. In the meanwhile, this portfolio of photographs has been produced. Hopefully, its circulation will enable us to learn of new evidence and documentation which can be

incorporated into our final catalogue. Additionally, it was felt that the photographs taken by Mr. William Pooley were so fine that the catalogue could be considered a portfolio of works in photography on their own. The Museum is deeply indebted to Mr. Pooley for his excellent work under difficult conditions and with limitations of studio equipment.

The Museum is most grateful to Mr. H. Ray Dennis, who has loaned a number of superb pieces, both European and American, to the exhibition. The works by his forebear, Thomas Dennis of Ipswich, are the greatest treasures of their kind in America. Special thanks are due to Mr. John McKee for the color transparency of the "President's Chair" which appears on the cover, and Mrs. Samuel Z. Smith for her help on the check list. To the entire Museum staff, whose members have helped to move furniture, register it and prepare this catalogue, goes my sincere appreciation.

Everyone looks forward to the prompt publication of the full catalogue so that we may share our collection with those unable to visit the galleries and provide, in some small way, more information for those engaged in the all-important pursuit of furniture research. We hope the catalogue will make more clear the art of American furniture.

R. PETER MOOZ
Director

CHECK LIST

Measurements of objects are overall and in inches.

Dates, in five year segments, indicate the generally accepted earliest and latest dates for the style adjusted to the place of origin.

By means documentary evidence establishes the maker.

Probably means the style and construction, indicates a certain place of origin or maker.

Possibly means historical or stylistic evidence, suggests an attribution to a place of origin or maker.

About means the usual date accepted for similar objects.

American Furniture

1. BOOKCASE

New England, 1750-1825

Pine

Top height 43½; width 52¾; depth 12½

Base height 39; width 53¾; depth 13¾

Transfer to collections. 1974.2

2. BOX

Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1665-1675

Oak

By Thomas Dennis (1638(?)-1706)

Height 14; width 25½; depth 17¼

History: The box, which contained Dennis family documents, descended directly from the maker to its present owner.

Lent by Mr. H. Ray Dennis. 5.1965

3. ARMCHAIR (WAINSCOT)

Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1665-1700

Oak

By Thomas Dennis (1638(?)-1706)

Height 48½; width 25½; depth 15¼

Note: Since its presentation to Bowdoin by a lineal

descendant of Thomas Dennis, this chair is referred to as the "President's Chair."

Gift of Mr. E. Wilder Farley. 1872.1

4. ARMCHAIR

Massachusetts (?), 1805-1830

Mahogany

Height 42¼; width 25¾; depth 21

Note: While popularly called a "Martha Washington" today, these chairs were originally termed lolling chairs.

History: Miss Dorothy Giddings (1785-1870), Exeter, N. H. and Brunswick, Me., to Alexander F. Boardman, Brunswick, Me. (1870), to Miss Edith J. Boardman, Brunswick, Me.

Gift of Miss Edith J. Boardman. 1935.19

5. ARMCHAIR

Probably Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, about 1840

Mahogany

Height 34½; width 23¾; depth 22

Note: A brass plaque on the crest rail is inscribed, "This chair belonged to Theophilus Walker. It

was in his counting room in Boston during his whole business career."

Gift of the Misses Mary and Harriet Walker.
1896.6

6. SIDE CHAIR

Connecticut, possibly Milford, 1710-1780

Maple

Height (including finial) $44\frac{1}{2}$; width $19\frac{1}{2}$;
depth $14\frac{1}{2}$

Note: The crest rail has been cut down.

Museum purchase. 1973.8

7. SIDE CHAIR

Massachusetts, probably Boston, 1730-1760

Walnut

Height 39; width $21\frac{1}{4}$; depth $17\frac{3}{4}$

Gift of Mr. Henry Gilman '97. 1968.115

8. SIDE CHAIR

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, about 1770

Mahogany

Height $40\frac{1}{2}$; width $22\frac{3}{8}$; depth $17\frac{3}{4}$

Note: The splat is a replacement.

Gift of Mr. John H. Halford, Jr. '38. 1966.57
a & b

9. SIDE CHAIR

Probably American, 1760-1850

Mahogany

Height 37; width $21\frac{1}{4}$; depth 22

Note: An example of so-called "Country Chippendale,"
this rural chair could have been made anywhere
from Virginia to New England.

Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.17

10. SIDE CHAIR

Probably Connecticut, 1820-1830

Soft Maple

Height $31\frac{1}{2}$; width $19\frac{1}{8}$; depth $15\frac{1}{4}$

Note: One of the varieties of so-called "fancy chairs," it
is virtually identical to chairs by Seymour Watrous,
who advertised in Hartford, March 2, 1824.

Bequest of Miss Mabel S. Davies. 1947.22

11. SIDE CHAIR

New England, 1825-1860

Stenciled, probably Maple

Height $31\frac{3}{4}$; width $17\frac{3}{4}$; depth 20

Note: The legs were sawed off by Joseph Griffin.

History: According to tradition the chair was owned
by H. W. Longfellow while a student at Bowdoin.
Longfellow gave it to Joseph Griffin, an early
Maine printer. It was given to Mr. Marrett by
Charles Griffin, who inherited it from Joseph.

Gift of Mr. Walter H. Marrett '76. 1926.11

12. CHEST

Massachusetts, 1675-1700

Oak

Attributed to Thomas Dennis (1638(?)-1706)

Height 31; width $45\frac{3}{4}$; depth $19\frac{3}{4}$

Lent by Mr. H. Ray Dennis. 5.1965

13. CHEST OF DRAWERS
(BLOCK-FRONT)

Boston or Rhode Island, 1740-1765

Walnut

Height 30; width 37; depth $21\frac{3}{8}$

Note: The brasses are original.

Gift of Mr. John H. Halford '07 and Mrs.
Halford. 1964.39

14. CHEST OF DRAWERS
(ROUND-FRONT)

New England, probably Maine, 1790-1820

Mahogany and Pine

Height $33\frac{1}{2}$; width $38\frac{7}{8}$; depth $21\frac{1}{8}$

Gift of the Honorable Percival P. Baxter '98.
1962.32

15. HIGH CHEST OF DRAWERS

Massachusetts, about 1750

Mahogany

Height 87; width $40\frac{1}{4}$; depth $22\frac{1}{2}$

Note: The brasses are replacements.

Gift from the Chase House. 1964.28

16. DESK AND BOOKCASE

Pennsylvania, probably Lancaster, 1765-1790

Walnut

Bookcase height $56\frac{3}{4}$; width $38\frac{1}{2}$; depth
 $11\frac{1}{2}$

Desk height $44\frac{3}{4}$; width $42\frac{1}{2}$; depth $22\frac{1}{8}$

Note: The feet are restored.

Gift of Mrs. Charles F. Parker, Jr. 1966.17

17. DESK (OXBOW-FRONT)

Massachusetts, about 1770

Mahogany

Height $42\frac{7}{8}$; width $45\frac{1}{4}$; depth 22

Note: According to tradition this desk was once owned
by the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bowdoin '25.
The brasses are not original.

Gift of Misses Mary and Harriet Walker.
1897.2

18. TAMBOUR DESK

Boston, Massachusetts, 1800-1825

Mahogany

Height $48\frac{1}{8}$; width $40\frac{1}{2}$; depth $20\frac{1}{8}$

Note: According to tradition this desk once belonged
to the inventor Eli Whitney.

History: Eli Whitney (1765-1825), Westboro, Mass.;
George H. Whitney, Westboro, Mass. to Mrs.
George H. Whitney (1882); Humphrey Moore
Tyler (1885), Milford, N. H. to Mrs. H. Tyler
Broad, Springvale, Me.; Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross,
Bangor, Me.

Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.14

19. LOOKING GLASS

Possibly Philadelphia, 1760-1790

Mahogany

Height 34; width $19\frac{5}{8}$; depth $\frac{7}{8}$

Note: Frequently looking glasses in this style were im-
ported from England.

Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.27

20. LOOKING GLASS

New England, possibly Boston, 1815-1830

Gilded Pine

Height $45\frac{3}{4}$; width $28\frac{1}{4}$; depth $5\frac{1}{4}$

Transfer to collections. 1974.5

21. LOOM

Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1665-1700

Oak

By Thomas Dennis (1638(?)-1706)

Length $38\frac{1}{2}$; width $9\frac{1}{8}$; depth $\frac{5}{8}$

Lent by Mr. H. Ray Dennis. 4.1965

22. MIRROR
New England, 1825-1850
Pine, painted black and gold; metal rosettes
Height 22½; width 15⅞; depth 2¼
Gift of Mr. Henry Gilman '97. 1968.112
23. SOFA
Probably Maine, 1820-1840
Mahogany
Height 35; width 61¾; depth 22⅞
Gift of Miss Edith J. Boardman. 1935.41
24. CARD TABLE
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1765-1785
Mahogany and Oak
Height 20; width 34¾; depth 16½
Gift of Mr. John H. Halford '07 and Mrs. Halford. 1964.38
25. CARD TABLE
New England, probably Rhode Island, about 1790
Mahogany
Height 29; width 36; depth 16¾
Note: The table has been attributed to David Pognand (act. 1787).
Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.15
26. CARD TABLE
Massachusetts, probably Salem, 1795-1815
Mahogany
Height 29¼; width 35¾; depth 17½
Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.16
27. CARD TABLE
Boston, Massachusetts, 1790-1815
Mahogany
Height 29¼; width 36⅞; depth 17½
Bequest of Mr. Bernard Samuels, Wiscasset. 1960.40
28. CARD TABLE
Probably Boston, or Philadelphia, 1820-1835
Mahogany
Height 29; width 35½; depth 18
Note: Formerly attributed to Duncan Phyfe.
History: Miss Dorothy Giddings, Brunswick, Me. to Miss Edith J. Boardman, Brunswick, Me.
Bequest of Miss Edith J. Boardman. 1936.11
29. PIER TABLE
New York, possibly Albany or Rochester, 1825-1840
Grained Pine
Height 36¾; width 42; depth 18
Note: The gilt decoration is original.
History: The table was brought to Maine from Rochester by Mr. Lee.
Bequest of Mr. F. C. Lee, Wiscasset. 1964.12

European Furniture

30. ARMCHAIR
English, 1780-1800
Mahogany
Height $36\frac{3}{4}$; width $23\frac{3}{4}$; depth 17
Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.23
Height $22\frac{1}{2}$; width 72; depth $22\frac{1}{2}$
Gift of the Honorable Percival P. Baxter.
1962.33
31. ARMCHAIR
English, 1795-1810
Mahogany
Height 35; width $23\frac{3}{8}$; depth $17\frac{1}{2}$
Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.24
32. SIDE CHAIR
English, 1725-1740
Walnut
Height 42; width 22; depth $19\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Mr. H. Ray Dennis. 6.1973 & 7.1973
33. SIDE CHAIR
English, 1805-1815
Mahogany
Height $36\frac{1}{2}$; width $20\frac{7}{8}$; depth 18
Note: Sometimes called a Trafalgar chair, the motifs derive from a suite owned by the Prince Regent (George IV) at Brighton made to honor Lord Nelson's Victory at Trafalgar.
Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.18
34. CHEST (CASSONE)
Italian, 16th century
Walnut
35. CHEST OF DRAWERS
Flemish or Italian, 17th century
Oak and Walnut
Height $37\frac{1}{2}$; width 49; depth $22\frac{1}{8}$
Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss. 1948.24
36. CHEST AND STAND
French, 16th century
Oak
Chest height $14\frac{5}{8}$; width 22; depth $16\frac{1}{2}$
Stand height $13\frac{1}{4}$; width $23\frac{5}{8}$; depth $19\frac{1}{2}$
Note: The lid is replaced; the stand is rebuilt.
Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss. 1948.22 & 1948.23
37. CLOCK
English, about 1680
Walnut
By Christopher Gould
Height $85\frac{1}{2}$; width $18\frac{3}{4}$; depth $9\frac{1}{4}$
Note: The works were made in London.
Gift of Mr. John H. Halford, Jr. '38. 1966.85
38. COMMODO
French, 1740-1770
Fruitwood, Oak, Marquetry and Ormolu
By Joseph Baumhauer (d. 1772)

Height $33\frac{1}{2}$; width $56\frac{3}{4}$; depth 25

Note: JOSEPH is stamped on the frame under the marble top.

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss. 1948.25

39. LOOKING GLASS

Italian, 18th century

Gilded Wood

Height 55; width $26\frac{1}{2}$; depth $1\frac{3}{8}$

Bequest of Mr. Bernard Samuels, Wiscasset.
1960.20

40. LOOKING GLASS

English, 1780-1800(?)

Gilded Wood

Height 45; width $18\frac{7}{10}$

Gift of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1959.1

41. SETTEE

Portuguese, about 1770

Mahogany

Height 53; width $71\frac{3}{4}$; depth $23\frac{1}{4}$

Gift of Mr. John H. Halford, Jr. '38. 1966.84

42. SIDEBOARD

English, 1790-1810

Mahogany

Height $38\frac{1}{4}$; width $57\frac{7}{8}$; depth 22

Note: The design follows illustrations in *The Cabinet-Maker's London Book of Prices* (1788), by Thomas Shearer.

Bequest of Mrs. Sylvia E. Ross. 1963.13

43. CHAIR OF STATE (STALLE)

English, 16th century

Oak

Height (including finials) $72\frac{1}{2}$; width $27\frac{1}{4}$;
depth $17\frac{3}{4}$

Gift of Mr. Herbert H. Richardson from the
Estate of Mr. Curtis Appleton Perry '77.
1931.14

PLATES























